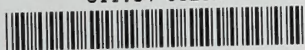


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the more I wonder


poems by KAY SAGE

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the more I wonder

poems by KAY SAGE

the more I wonder

BOOKMAN ASSOCIATES, NEW YORK

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Acknowledgment is made to the *New York Herald-Tribune* for permission to the reprinting of poems by Kay Sage which appeared in the *Conning Tower* in 1936.

Acknowledgment is made for permission to reprint the poem "Into View" which first appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1944 entitled "My House."

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the more I wonder

AN OBSERVATION

The more I wonder,
the longer I live,
how so much water
can stay in a sieve.

SELECTIVE

There are just enough people
who know what is what,
for me not to bother with those
who do not.

PARADOX

In the night
wisdom came to me
and the next day
I committed the folly
which I no longer
had any desire
to commit.

IF A HOLE

If a hole
were just a hole
without a thing around it,
who would know
it was a hole
and how
would they
have found it?

IN THE MIRROR

Do not look
at yourself
always
in the same
mirror.

PATER NOSTER

God helps me a lot,
God bless Him,
so when it's not urgent
I don't like to press Him.

THE WINDOW

My room has two doors
and one window.
One door is red and the other is gray.
I cannot open the red door;
the gray door does not interest me.
Having no choice,
I shall lock them both
and look out of the window.

MUTATION

Do not count on me; I change
much as the moving mountain range.
My premises slide a bit every season,
never for any very good reason.

SEASON TO TASTE

springboard;

where the cowslips

there slip I

summary;

summer in the houses

fever in the hay

showers in the thunder

dreams in the day

windfall;

frost in the killing

weather in the vane

bulls in the rushes

hurry in the cane

winter rose;

fire in the place again

three wise snow men.

DOMUS

My house has no foundations;
it is built on rock and rubble.
It stands there by the grace of God
with very little trouble.

It's just as good as any house,
although it's not so steady;
but, for the day it tumbles down,
my plans are made already.

COMPENSATION

After a day
of careless depravity,
I go to sleep
by force of gravity.

HEROICS

Because I run
it does not mean
I am not out of breath;
my courage comes from being
scared to death.

WRONG FOOT

If you are wearing a pair of shoes
which hurt you,
after a short time
you will get accustomed to them
and pain will cease.
Never take them off
unless you mean to discard them completely,
for, if you put them on again,
they will hurt you terribly
where you are already bruised.

LAUNDRY

I took my laundry out to iron—
quite a natural thing to do—
it had been crumpled for much too long
and I hoped I could make it look like new.

And what do you think they said to me,
as though I were doing wrong somehow;
“What is the matter? What are you doing?
What is the reason? Why do you have to?
Why do you iron your laundry now?”

I’ve put my laundry back in a bundle,
nothing could make me try any more;
but it’s not my fault if they find tomorrow
more of a mess than there was before—

And I’ll go, right now, to the end of the street
and buy myself a brand-new sheet.

FULL MEASURE

If you put
all your eggs
in one basket,
at least you will have
a basket full
of eggs.

MISCALCULATION

I'm robbing Peter
to pay Paul,
a tactical error
I've made—
for Peter
has simply
missed
nothing at all,
and Paul
does not
really
want
to be paid.

CREDIT

Take your chance
when it comes your way;
take it today,
not tomorrow.
Take it
whether you like it or not
and if you can't pay for it,
borrow.

PEGASUS

I'm riding for a fall
and I know it
and I don't care at all
and I show it.

I'm riding for a fall
with an awful clatter;
but if it didn't hurt at all,
would it matter?

SECRETS

I have a blister
from shelling lima beans,
and I have a sister
who tells me what she means—
but I also have a mister
behind the scenes.

STANDARDS

Standard of gold, of silver, of tin,
rich man, poor man, beggarman, knave;
only the good man knows how to sin
and only the coward is brave.

EIGHT-DAY CLOCK

Morning yawning

11 leaden

noon too soon

1 undone

5 alive

7 heaven

9 divine

10, 11, 12 and 1,

more, more, more

fun

night tight

Morning yawning. . . .

SMOKE

It is bad enough
to have
a cigarette
and no match,
but it is worse
to want
a cigarette
while you are
smoking one.

QUEEN

Life is not a bed of roses
nor, not quite, a bed of thorns;
life is just a bloody chessboard
full of much too many pawns.

THEY TOIL NOT

Said the lily to the top,
will you kindly, kindly stop
spinning.

A SMALL TREE

I took a small tree
which had no branches
and I transplanted it.

I chose richer soil
because I wanted
a big tree.

The tree grew no taller
but many branches
sprouted from it.

One by one
as the branches grew,
I cut them off
for firewood.

At last the branches
ceased to grow.

I pulled up
the small tree
and put it back
where it had come from.

QUESTION OF DEGREE

There are some things that
when you do not have them
you wish you did.
And there are some things that
when you do not have them
you go out and get them.

ERROR

We all of us realize our mistakes
too late
except those of us
who realize them beforehand
but nevertheless
commit them.

RESILIENCY

My heart is made of triplex,
for your guidance in this matter;
you can crack it, you can break it
but it simply will not shatter.

THE ROLLING STONE

The rolling stone it rolled and rolled,
and it gathered no moss and gathered no gold,
but it sang to itself as it rolled along
just for the fun of hearing the song.

The rolling stone it rolled and rolled
till it got too shiny and smooth to hold,
and it laughed at the stones that were gathering moss,
who were lumpy and bumpy and terribly cross.

DEBACLE

Drop a hat
or let a crown fall,
men have always been
my downfall.

MY SISTER

I met a man along the road,
 I said, "Excuse me mister,
 but do you think that you could tell me
 where to find my sister?"
 He looked at me so strangely,
 I thought he might be crazy;
 "Yes," he said, "I'm sure I can,"
 and handed me a daisy.

SUMMER SEQUENCE

Summer stars
 summarize
 and some are glass
 glass eyes
 isinglass
 eyes in glass houses
 throwing stones.

AUTUMN ATTIC

Caterpillar
pill or cat,
autumn
oughtn't
automat.

LULLABY

Little lambs, the sun is setting,
little lambs, little lambs;
time to rest and stop your fretting,
little lambs.

Little lambs, when you are sheep,
there'll be time and time to weep;
shut your woolly eyes and sleep,
little lambs.

R.S.V.P.

If I were free and you were free
with no one to ask and no one to see,
and we could do what we wanted to,
what would you want of me?

I'll answer for you and you answer for me;
if you were free and I were free,
you wouldn't do what you think you would,
when everything's easy, one is good
and you wouldn't want to, once you could . . .

Now you answer for me.

THE RED DRESS

I have taken the gaudy clothes off
the small wooden saint
who stands in an attitude of prayer;
a crimson skirt, stiff with age,
a ridiculous blue taffeta cloak,
jewels of tinsel and seed pearls.

So that she should not quite be naked,
I have painted her body red.
She is a little ashamed of it
but the red dress she is wearing
is very becoming to her.

I have not thrown away her clothes
for, should she be too uncomfortable,
I shall dress her again.

REUNION

At last
in bed
at night
they meet—

My feet.

ILLUSIONS

There was an old woman
who hadn't a thing to wear
except holes.
So she sewed the holes together
and she dressed herself with care;
but people passed her in the street
as though she were not there.

COMEDY

And there it is;
another curtain down,
another program
just to throw away.
But, never mind,
I've had my trip to town
and any critic would have loved
the play.

DESTINY

If I turn back
at least I shall not have
the sun in my face.
But then there will always be
the long shadow of myself
before me.

VINTAGE

When you are old,
if you cannot sit straight
in your rocking chair,
lean back.

If you lean forward,
you will only fall
on your face.

BILL OF RIGHTS

Anyone's glasses are alright
if they can see with them;
anyone's pleasures, problems, perfections, or perversities
are also O. K.
as long as they don't bother *me* with them.

MR. JONES

Mr. Jones never smokes
never loves, never drinks—
Mr. Jones would never possibly
have thought of robbing Brink's.
Mr. Jones stinks.

SOME DAY

Sometimes I see myself in the mirror
taller than I really am
and I look at my reflection
in admiration.

Other times I am taller
than myself in the mirror.

Sometimes I see the distances
very close to me.
Small trees and houses
are like toys that I could touch
with my hand.

People are little things
that I could crush
with one finger.

Sometimes I see the sea as a wall;
the fishing boats are pasted
onto the side of the blue wall
in a most curious manner.

Some day, when I am taller
than myself in the mirror,
when I have touched small trees and houses
with my hand
and crushed little people
with one finger,
I shall climb to the top of this blue wall
to see what is on the other side.

REGIMENTATION

In New York
on East 53rd Street
I saw a fly
walking across the street
on the green light.

ABLUTION

We all smell the same
when we sweat.
Some of us wash
and some of us
don't.

A POEM LOVELY AS A TREE

Only God can make the trees
but men make paper out of these
for magazines and W. C.'s.

HYPHEN

If everyone knew everyone
from Cuba to Canton,
there'd be no block to any
city street;
everyone knows Jonathan
and everyone knows John
but Jonathan and John
will never meet.

FEMALE

English women
are bitches,
Italian women
are whores,
French women
are putains,
and American women
are bores.

THE GRAM FAMILY

Ana Gram and Milli Gram
were twins.

They were as different as two pins
when two pins are different.

Milli was very very small,
in fact she hadn't developed at all
since the age of ten.

Ana was tall and pliable
but unreliable
as she kept coming apart
and putting herself together again.

Ana married Mr. Lyst
and became tiresome and serious,
while Milli fell for Mr. O'Naire,
grew large, unhealthy, and utterly delirious.

Mr. and Mrs. Gram
took it on their chins—
They never really gave a damn
about the twins.

WAITING IN THE LOBBY

Opposite me is a mink coat
waiting
there is something inside the mink coat
that has a hat on it
and a lot of legs and shoes,
but the important part is the mink coat.
At the desk
above the pigeonholes for letters and keys
there is a workman with overalls and a pleasant face.
He appears and disappears behind the wooden partition
like a jack-in-the-box.
I can't think that he is accomplishing
anything very important.
There is a lovely gentleman
walking up and down
and back and forth.
He is wearing a black overcoat,
gray striped trousers,
a black and red striped tie,
a derby, spats
and a pseudo-aristocratic face.
Altogether he is immaculate and perfect.
I am afraid he is not as nice as he looks,
moreover, he is making me nervous.
There is a white-haired lady
in a leopard coat

flat-footed shoes and a pale gray hat
tilted just at the wrong angle.
She walks in and out of the revolving door
for no apparent reason
and each time she passes, she smiles at the man at the desk.
The dolefully modern young man
with large spectacles
who stands beside the clock
in an attitude of inferiority complex
pretends he doesn't quite remember who he is waiting for
and that it doesn't in the least matter.
He only wishes it would get late quickly
so he wouldn't have to wait any more.
His pockets are too small for his hands
and he would much rather I didn't look at him.
The mink coat is smoking a cigarette
and throwing the ashes on the floor.
White things shoot down a glass tube
which ends on top of a mail box
where it says MAIL EARLY
What is early?
Efficient women stride in
with wire-haired terriers on leashes
and snow-boots on their large feet.
An orchestra is playing a nostalgic tune
in a distant room
where there are more people waiting.
They are very patient, these people.
I only wish the immaculate gentleman

would stop walking up and down
and back and forth.

Why doesn't he speak to the mink coat
or write a letter that he could mail early?

I am not waiting for anyone.

I am just watching the workman in overalls
appear and disappear behind the wooden partition
like a jack-in-the-box.

AMERICAN COCKTAIL PARTY IN PARIS

The room was early modern.
There was no color, nor did there seem to be
any pleasant absence of it.
The paneling
had been scraped off the walls,
but they had forgotten the cornice
and the dirty white marble mantel.
The chairs were too big
or perhaps the room was too small.
On the grand piano
there was an elongated white china panther
and a large photograph of a royal prince
in a silver frame.
One had the impression
of being underground.
A young man sang at the piano.
The room was full of very tall women.
There was a sad man with drooping mustaches
who kept repeating that he ski-ed badly.
There was a German who passed nuts and olives
which nobody took
and there was a butler
who did nothing at all.
There was myself looking at magazines
which I had already seen,
and there was an Italian count on the sofa
whispering to lighthouse No. 1.

She kept shaking her head
to make her hair swish.
She had very short, very red fingernails.
The cocktails tasted like ether.
The young man at the piano
drank sherry
and displayed a gold bracelet on his right wrist.
He sang "Mariposa," and then suddenly
he yodeled.

ANGELUS DEI

How do angels get their clothes on?
What do angels do?
Is there an extra piece that sews on
after the wings come through?
No one's thought of it I guess;
How in the world does an angel dress?

ECONOMY

I used to have a lot of theories,
now I haven't any.
I do whatever the least me wearies
that costs the smallest penny.

VARNISH

If she's a harlot,
paint her scarlet;
if she's a saint,
don't waste the paint.

AMITY

There are good friends,
good friends indeed;
good friends in need
always
of something.

TRIAL BY FIRE

How many saints
have been burned at the stake,
as, God knows, how many
should.

It is like the potatoes
we put in to bake;
they have to be cooked
to be good.

MORALITY

She's just a whore
no less, no more;
but due to morals
and didactics,
she's much too pure
to really practice.

ROCK-A-BYE

Rocker in the kitchen,
rockets in the sky;
on the rocks
the millionaire
the mermaid
and the rye.

CREED

Anything that's good
is plastic,
all religions
are elastic.

Nothing solid
is reliable,
intelligence
is pliable.

FUNERAL IN MILAN

A tall gray Gothic church.
Heavy, dusty black hangings at the door
emblazoned at the top
with a religious inscription in silver tape.
The funeral procession arrives and stops.
Slow mournful black horses
with black blankets and black plumes,
a slow mournful black group of followers,
the women with black scarfs
and red eyes,
the men with black hats in their hands,
mopping their brows.
Many flowers
some of them pungent and a little withered,
others of tin
all tied with black ribbons.
Hot sun and dust.
Trams pass, tinkling furiously;
taxis scream, children stare.
A butcher's cart draws up
behind the procession.
The driver jumps down and, together with a boy
whose white apron is stained with blood,
they pull from the cart and drag in the dust
by the stumpy remains of half-amputated legs,
the pale peeled body
of a cow.

CHATELAINE

When she had a palace,
a long time ago,
she yearned for a back yard
where the sunflowers grow.

Now she has the back yard
and she's rid of all the weeds;
but she left, in the palace,
the sunflower seeds.

SEVEN MEN IN A BOAT AT NIGHT

There were five men in a boat
which was rowed by two sailors.
One man lay on his back,
looked at the stars and thought;
how very slowly we are going.
Another man looked at the coast and watched
the lights of a car going along the road.
The third man looked down into the sea
and wondered how deep it was;
he put his hand in the water and thought
it was no cooler than it had been an hour ago.
The fourth man looked at the first man
and thought that he was very foolish.
The fifth man closed his eyes,
yawned, and thought of nothing at all.

The two sailors looked at the five men.
One said to the other;
“It’s going to be fine tomorrow,”
but the other did not answer.
He was thinking that his muscles were very tired
and that it would be good to get home.

WATER UNDER THE BRIDGES

Water under the bridges,
so much water;
vas-y, avanti, go ahead
and drown, my darling daughter.

SHOES

Shoes are hanging out to dry
hanging on a line,
they'll be polished by and by;
shine, shoes, shine.

Shoes are walking down the street,
walking on a line;
dusty shoes on tired feet,
shine, shoes, shine.

AUTUMN

The season is over.
Brown people are beginning to look yellow,
white shoes have been cleaned too often
and white clothes
have not been cleaned often enough.
It is no use pretending
the summer can last forever;
no one wants it to.
We are tired of the sea and sailboats,
we are tired of cold consommé
on terraces,
we are tired of wearing shorts
and of sleeping after lunch.
Let us face the fact
that the days are growing shorter
and the evenings are getting cool.
It is time now to think of
trains, old tunes, blankets, and friends.
It is time to write letters
and balance accounts.

PLACE DE LA RIPONNE

Lausanne

Sur la Place de la Riponne
 it is fun, it is fun.
 There's a boy who swallows fire,
 broken glass and bits of wire.
 There's a lady all tattooed—
 now then, sir, please don't be rude.
 There's a man who shows his muscles,
 and a Chinaman who tussles,
 there's a trip that goes to Hades—
 Come on, gentlemen and ladies!
 There is music, there is tooting,
 there's a gallery for shooting—
 Come along and get your gun!
 It is fun, it is fun
 sur la Place de la Riponne.

Well, it's time that we were going,
 it is snowing, it is snowing.
 There's a north wind in the offing
 and the muscled man is coughing.
 Come along, the show is done.
 It was fun, it was fun
 sur la Place de la Riponne.

LITERATURE

We were reading different books
all the time;
we never knew it
until you shut yours
and I shut mine.

We were reading different books;
well, what of it?
You liked yours—
I *wrote* mine
and I love it.

INTO VIEW

Q: "How many stories has your house?"

A: "Well, there's abasement, a best seller, a sad story,
a tall story, a fairy story and a symptomatic.
But I live on the first flaw."

OCCUPATIONS

When I'm tight
I write.
To paint,
I must be sober.
There might be something in this
that I should think over.

KALEIDOSCOPE

It is only when things are turned
slowly and thoughtfully
that one can see where details
which have no beauty
can go to make a beautiful design.
If you turn anything
fast enough
it is apt to make
a pretty pattern.

A CONSIDERATION

I saw some brains at the butcher's shop,
I was told they were very fine—
and I shuddered to think, as I looked at them,
they were probably better than mine.

ARROGANCE

The only thing in the world
that I cannot get on without
is a pencil.
I can always find
paper.

CHINOISERIE

English, French, Italian,
I can write in all of these,
but, at best, they are translations.
I think in Chinese.

